

Articles

Who Fired First? Students' Construction of Meaning From One Textbook Account of the Israeli–Arab Conflict*

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ABSTRACT

In this article, I present three students' and one parent's reading of an excerpt from a textbook on the Israeli–Arab conflict. The excerpt is an account of a skirmish between Jews and Arabs in 1920, symbolizing for Jews the first bloody encounter between the two sides. While all students read the same excerpt, they use different mechanisms in their reading process to decipher the text, and come to different historical conclusions about the meaning of the text. The three mechanisms of reading identified in the article are “horizon of expectations,” “the gap in the text,” and “narrative integration.” While “horizon of expectations” focuses on the beliefs that readers bring with them to the textual account, “the gap in the text” centers on how meaning is made in the process of reading. Finally, “narrative integration” highlights the way in which text readers integrate the account they read with other information they acquired earlier. In the conclusion of the article I compare the three processes readers use in their engagement with the text.

On August 14, 1999, a front-page headline in the *New York Times* declared: “Israel's History Textbooks Replace Myth With Facts.” The article described three new Israeli middle school history textbooks in which traditional accounts of the Israeli–Arab conflict, contending that Arabs fled Palestine voluntarily in the 1948 War, had been rewritten. According to the new textbooks, “in some cases [the Palestinians were] expelled by Israeli soldiers.” Schoolchildren had read in earlier texts that “the 1948 War of Independence was a near miracle of David-and-Goliath”; they now learned that “on nearly every front and in nearly every battle, the Jewish side had the advantage over the Arabs.” The new textbooks, asserted the *New York Times*, “mark a quiet revolution in the teaching of history to most Israeli pupils” (*New York Times*, August 14, 1999).

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Changing textbooks is only revolutionary, however, if in fact the students internalize the textbook account as it appears on the page. As many scholars in the past few decades have pointed out we must not equate the text with the reader. In her introduction to *The Reader in the Text: Essays on Audience and Interpretation*, Susan Suleiman (1980) asserts that the terms "reader" and "audience" were "once relegated to the status of unproblematic words." "Perhaps," continues Suleiman, "no single idea has had as tenacious and influential a hold over the critical imagination in our century as that of textual unity or wholeness" (p. 40). Michel De Certeau also echoes this view when he says that a common assumption among the elite is that the public consumes products uncritically: "To assume that," writes De Certeau (1995), "is to misunderstand the act of 'consumption'" (p. 152; Todorov, 1982).

The process of reading, which De Certeau names "the act of 'consumption,'" is, however, a complex and multifaceted phenomenon that has been little explored. What in fact are the processes by which individuals read and derive meanings from the text? Different readers may derive different meanings from texts for several reasons, ranging from mundane and simple to the sophisticated and complex. As Gerald Prince (1980) points out:

Of course, a given reader may be very tired or not at all, very young or very old, in a good mood or in a bad one; he may have a very good or a very deficient memory, a very great or very limited capacity for decentration, a considerable or moderate attention span; he may be a more or less experienced reader; he may be reading the text for the first, second, or tenth time; he may find the sentences and situations presented more or less familiar; he may want to read for fun or out of a sense of duty; he may show particular interest in the language, the plot, the characters, or the symbolism; he may hold one set of beliefs or another; and so on. . . . His physiological, psychological, and sociological conditioning, his predispositions, feelings, and needs may vary greatly and so may his reading: his knowledge, his interests, and his aims determine to a certain extent the conventions, assumptions, and presuppositions he takes to underlie the text. (p. 229)

No less important than the individual elements framing the meaning the reader draws from a text are the cultural and social aspects circumscribing the possible range of meanings available to him or her while reading (Griswold, 1987; Iser, 1979). These contextual issues place a set of constraints on the range of possible meanings that readers derive in the reading process, yet do not dictate the meanings actualized by the reader.

In the field of reading comprehension, several studies have demonstrated that the meaning drawn from a text depends not only on the text itself but also on the beliefs and social background of the readers (Chambliss, 1994; Chambliss & Garner, 1996; Dole & Sinatra, 1994). In one such study, the researchers presented people holding opposite views on capital punishment with evidence supporting both perspectives on this issue. The

subjects read the text in ways that upheld their initial views and criticized the opposing study as methodologically flawed and unpersuasive (Kardash & Scholes, 1995, 1996; Lord, Ross, & Lepper, 1979). Other researchers found that not only do people tend to read text in a manner that supports their personal beliefs, but they also read in a way that matches their cultural schemata. The researchers found that groups of White and African-American students interpreted identical texts in distinctly different ways. They presented the two groups with a text of “sounding”—a form of ritual verbal abuse common in the African-American community. While African-American students tended to interpret the text as verbal play, White students were more likely to see it as the expression of a physical altercation (Reynolds, Taylor, Steffensen, Shirey, & Anderson, 1982).

Yet important as these studies are, they present us with the meanings that people derive from texts but do not demonstrate the processes that govern individual construction of textual meaning. In this paper I analyze a few instances in which individuals reading the same text form conflicting understandings of it. In other words, I bring the reader and the text together to examine, in Wolfgang Iser’s (1979) terms, the process by which the text is realized. My aim is not limited to demonstrating the different meanings that readers make out of the same text; I also aim to explore the processes employed by individuals in arriving at these differing meanings. To do so I present a number of instances that reveal the process by which students read and draw opposing meanings from a single sentence.¹

In the first section of the paper, I present the textbook excerpt under discussion in more detail, followed by the author’s statements about his *intended meaning*. In addition, I place the excerpt in relation to earlier accounts of the same event used in the Israeli education system. In the following sections I turn to the readers’ *realized meaning*.

Organized in this way, the paper aims to demonstrate the gap between the intended meaning of the author and the realized meaning of the readers, and show the significance of cultural, social, and individual aspects in the process of reading and forming textual meaning.

METHOD AND ANALYSIS

The data presented in this article are taken from a larger research project (reported in full in “identifying comment”). Two schools took part in the study: City School and Talmud School. Both schools are located in Jerusalem, the former is an elite school for secular students, while the latter is a *yeshiva* (religious academy) high school that serves students identified with Israel’s nationalist-religious population. The two schools represent opposing sides of Israeli society: City School representing the left wing which strongly advocates a peaceful resolution to the Israeli–Arab conflict and opposes the settlement movement in the territories occupied since 1967,

whereas Talmud School represents the Israeli right wing which adamantly advocates further settlement and opposes the establishment of a Palestinian state in these territories. In fact many of the students in Talmud school come from such settlements in the Occupied Territories. Another important difference is that while City School is co-ed, Talmud School is an all-boys school.

Both schools, however, are part of the Israeli public school system, which follows the mandatory history curriculum, dictated by the Israeli Ministry of Education (the Israeli educational system is centralized, with a single national curriculum). The students in both these schools completed the national matriculation exam in history while in the 11th grade and exceed the national average in the history matriculation exam, which was 75.2% in 2000 (roughly B+). City School students received an average grade of 79.9% (B+) on their history matriculation exam, while Talmud School students obtained an average of 84.8% (A-).

Eleven students participated in this study (six from City School [three girls; three boys]; five from Talmud School [all boys]). All were 17 year olds and attended 12th grade. The results of the readings of these students as a group was reported elsewhere. In this article I select specific student accounts that shed light on their process of reading.

The data collection included three main phases:

Phase A

In the fall of 2001, students wrote narratives in response to the prompt “You are an author of a seventh-grade textbook. Write from memory an account of the Tel Hai event” (the event is discussed in detail later). These accounts served as the basis of comparison for later analysis (henceforth: the pre-narratives).

Phase B

In the second phase, in-depth interviews were conducted with the 11 students and their parents. The in-depth interviews, which took place at the students’ homes and averaged 45 minutes, consisted of three main parts:

- A. Pre-Narratives Read Aloud: The 11 students read aloud the narratives they had written in class and were questioned about these narratives to further elicit their initial historical memories. After they had expressed their views of the events, their parents, who had also written accounts of the events, discussed their own historical memories.

To avoid parents’ influencing their children’s viewpoint, parents were asked to write a pre-narrative account, similar to those written by students, before the interview began. In this way we had the student and parent committed to a certain narrative. In addition, when reading the excerpts, parents were allowed to present their views only

after the students read and had been questioned about their viewpoints. In most cases, a social interaction developed between the child and parent following the parents' presentations, an interaction which allowed us to observe the way social circumstances may shape a student's understanding (following Wineburg, 2001)

- B. Textbook Excerpts Read Aloud: After discussing their initial memories, the 11 students were asked to read aloud textbook excerpts about the Tel Hai event, which they then discussed. After each excerpt was read, we prompted students with the question, "What have you learned about the event from this excerpt?" Then we proceeded to question them, using an open-ended protocol. Following the students' elaboration, the parents also explained their understanding of the texts. As pointed out above, parents explained their understanding only after students had completed their readings and after they had been questioned about them.
- C. Oral Summaries: In the final part of the interview, the 11 students orally summarized their views of the event.

Phase C

The third phase of the study began approximately 12 months after the collection of the pre-narratives and 10 months after the interviews. In this phase, using the original prompt, we asked the 11 students to write another account of the event from their memory alone (henceforth: the post-narrative). The post-narratives were collected after the 11 students had graduated from high school.

In sum, four different sources of data are used in this study: (a) pre-narratives, (b) transcriptions of the interviews, (c) oral summaries, and (d) post-narratives. The collection of all the data used in this study was conducted concurrent to the recent cycle of violence that has enveloped Israelis and Palestinians.

As with any study, this project was subject to some limitations. First, the number of student participants ($n = 11$) was small and one must be wary of any far-reaching conclusions on the basis of such a small sample. Furthermore, the focus on a controversial event in Israeli society, while providing an extreme example of the range of ways that students interpret textbooks, also raises questions regarding the generalizability of the findings.

In this article I present the readings of three students and one parent. These readings were chosen since they demonstrate the use of different reading processes by students and not because they represent the most common reading of this account. The significance of these excerpts is in demonstrating potential ways of reading the text and in revealing the central role the reading process has in the reader's construction of meaning.

My interpretation of the individual readings is based on different theoretical paradigms. These paradigms sometimes present conflicting theo-

retical viewpoints; yet I believe that in interpreting the real world we cannot limit ourselves to an orthodox viewpoint propounded by one “truthful” theory. Rather, we should apply different theories, even conflicting ones, wherever they assist us best in interpreting the data.

THE TEXTBOOK ACCOUNT

The Author’s Reading²

One of the textbooks discussed in the *New York Times* article was *The 20th Century* which was published in 1999 and approved by the Israeli Ministry of Education. In it the author Eyal Naveh, a history professor at Tel Aviv University, portrays the first major battle between Jews and Arabs at the settlement of Tel Hai—an event that in the following years took on great symbolic significance in Jewish society, as a display of Jewish heroism and devotion to the Holy Land—as follows:

The Story of Tel Hai

Tel Hai was a tiny, remote community established near Metula and Kfar Giladi in 1918. At first this area was under the French Mandate, but its Bedouin and Arab population objected to its becoming French territory. On March 1, 1920 (the 11th of Iyar 5680 according to the Hebrew calendar), the Arabs besieged Tel Hai, asking to search it for Frenchmen. Due to a misunderstanding between them and Tel Hai’s Jewish inhabitants, someone opened fire, and a skirmish ensued that left several people dead.

The defenders of Tel Hai were headed by Joseph Trumpeldor. Trumpeldor was a Zionist leader who, while still in Russia, had established the Halutz Youth Movement with the aim of preparing young Jews for settlement in Israel.

During the battle he was fatally injured, and died on the way to Kfar Giladi. The remaining defenders abandoned Tel Hai and were evacuated to Kfar Giladi. They returned after a while, once it was established that the area would be governed by the British. (Naveh, 1999, p. 46, my translation)

The Tel Hai incident, as presented in this account, resulted from an unfortunate misunderstanding between the Jewish inhabitants and the Arab visitors. There was no clear animosity between Jews and Arabs, just between the Arabs and the French rulers. Neither the Jews nor the Arabs were responsible for the eruption of violence at Tel Hai. A nameless “someone” opened fire. As we will see later on, when we compare this account to previous ones, Naveh portrays the event as a relatively insignificant incident with no meaningful implications.

Indeed, in Naveh’s view the events that occurred at Tel Hai in March 1920 had no true significance in and of themselves. In an article they published a year after the publication of the textbook, Naveh and Esther Yogev, the pedagogical adviser to the textbook, wrote that “the Tel Hai incident [is] in and of itself quite a banal event” (Yogev & Naveh, 2000, p.

16; Naveh & Yogeve, 2002). The significance of Tel Hai, in their view, resides not in the event itself, but rather in the myth that it gave rise to in subsequent years. Only the memory of the incident as a heroic event has any true historical significance in shaping the perceptions of later generations (see also Zerubavel, 1995).

The homework that Naveh assigns students in the textbook focuses on the myth that developed around Tel Hai and its relevance to the present day. The text poses questions about the mythical narrative: “Trumpeldor’s last words are said to have been ‘it is good to die for one’s country.’ In your opinion, should this statement serve as a motto by which to educate the younger generation, or should it be contested?” (Naveh, 1999, p. 46). This question, as well as other sections of the textbook narrative, confront the student with the task of assessing not the historical event itself, but rather its aftermath and especially the formation of the mythical narrative. In their explanations appended to this assignment, the author and the pedagogical adviser Yogeve, state that “the questions [concerning the Tel Hai myth] engage the student in a critical dialogue with the myth of Trumpeldor. They question the meaning of his actions and the myth that grew around them, and provide the student with the opportunity to decide whether the myth is compatible with the present day, accords with his values and is meaningful for him” (Naveh & Yogeve, 2002, pp. 16–17).

It is the idea of a dialogue with the past that inspired Naveh and Yogeve in their formulation of the homework assignment. As they explain, borrowing from the terminology of the German philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer, the study of the past conjures up the horizon of the past in an encounter with the horizon of the present. According to this view, students continuously frame their conception of the past in light of their present. The student holds an “ongoing dialogue with his childhood and his life experience, with his historical heritage, his spiritual forefathers and his origins, be these what they may. This dialogue frames internal political and social viewpoints, which the individual compares with the changing realities of his life.” With this perspective in mind, Naveh and Yogeve (2002) constructed their textbook so that “learners are required to respond to a story, a saying, a slogan, an illustration or a symbol of a historical group or figure, from the worldview they [the students] hold today” (pp. 6–8; see also pp. 321–323).

In sum, the authors of *The 20th Century* focus their teaching of Tel Hai not on the historical occurrences but on the myth that these occurrences gave rise to and its relevance to the students’ present. The event of Tel Hai itself is insignificant as a historical incident. It resulted from a simple misunderstanding in which “someone” opened fire.

The Textbook Account in Context

In his analysis of Dostoevsky’s writings, Mikhail Bakhtin describes the phenomenon of “hidden dialogicality.” The dialogue takes place between a

visible speaker in the text, and a set of invisible speakers located in hidden narratives implied in the text. We cannot see the hidden narratives, yet they nonetheless shape the way in which the visible text formulates its account. “Although only one person is speaking” in this dialogue, writes Bakhtin (1973), “we feel that this is a conversation, and a most intense one at that, since every word that is present answers and reacts with its every fiber to the invisible interlocutor, it points outside itself, beyond its own borders to the other person’s unspoken word” (p. 164). The author shapes his account to respond to the statements and viewpoints of the invisible interlocutor.

Following Bakhtin, James Wertsch emphasizes the dialogic function of narrative in textbooks as well. Contrary to the common notion that texts stand alone, Wertsch (2002) points out that in fact, texts stand in relation to other texts: “It is essential to recognize,” he writes, “that narratives do not exist in isolation and do not serve as neutral cognitive instruments. Instead, they are embedded in concrete discourse characterized by dialogic and rhetorical opposition” (p. 59). In the shaping of historical events, textbook narratives respond to the hidden narratives of earlier textbooks.

This hidden dialogicality also shapes the textbook account of Tel Hai proposed by Naveh. The account of Tel Hai presented in *The 20th Century* differs from the Tel Hai accounts in previous textbooks on several key issues. As one scholar points out in his analysis of depictions of Tel Hai in textbooks from the 1950s to the 1980s, these earlier textbooks “echoed the mythical account [of Tel Hai] that appears in Zionist historiography, describing Joseph Trumpeldor’s dramatic defense effort and his death, and recounting how brave fearless Jews faced cunning and deceitful Arabs. . . . When the Arabs treacherously attacked [Tel Hai], several Jewish fighters, including Trumpeldor, died defending the settlement” (Podeh, 2002, p. 95). For example, in one such textbook coauthored by a leading Israeli historian and an educator, the authors state that “the Jewish settlement faced attacks from its Arab neighbors. The first violent encounter took place in Tel Hai in March of 1920, when the settlement was deceitfully attacked. Trumpeldor and his friends hurried to assist Tel Hai, and he and seven of his companions died a heroic death. . . . They became a symbol for all the defenders of the settlements from then on” (Katz & Hershko, 1968, p. 262; Avivi & Perski, 1960; Shemuli, 1970).

In his account Naveh contradicts many elements presented in previous narratives: while earlier textbooks pointed out that the Arabs intentionally attacked the Jews, Naveh portrays the encounter as one in which neither the Jews nor the Arabs had malevolent intentions; while the earlier textbooks portrayed the Arabs as the ones who opened fire, in the new textbook account “someone opened fire”; earlier textbooks portrayed Trumpeldor’s actions as heroic, whereas Naveh says almost nothing about Trumpeldor’s involvement in the incident. Overall, the Tel Hai event itself, portrayed in earlier textbooks as a symbol of Jewish heroism and as a mythical event, is presented in Naveh’s account as an insignificant incident

that resulted from an unfortunate misunderstanding. In fact, in questioning the myth of Tel Hai Naveh also questions the conventional account of it put forth in previous textbooks.

Horizon of Expectations

Even before readers turn the first page of the textbook, the meaning-making process is activated. As Hans Robert Jauss (1982) points out, readers come to a text with inner subjective conceptions about it that shape the way in which they will later read and decipher the text. A literary work, states Jauss, is not received in an experiential vacuum. A text “predisposes its audience to a very specific kind of reception by announcements, overt and covert signals, familiar characteristics, or implicit allusions. It awakens memories of that which was already read, brings the reader to a specific emotional attitude, and with its beginning arouses expectations for the ‘middle and end’” (Jauss, 1982, p. 23). In the spirit of Gadamer, Jauss coins the term “horizon of expectations,” which is a certain objectified perception of an entire set of texts from which the specific text is drawn. When the reader approaches the text he or she frames the subjective meaning in relation to this horizon of expectations, based on the genre to which the text is thought to belong (Holub, 1984).

It is not enough, points out Jauss, to examine a work of art or a text by focusing solely on its production or simply by describing it. It is necessary to consider the interaction between producer and receiver, between the author and the public. As Jauss asserts:

the analysis of the literary experience of the reader . . . describes the reception and the influence of the work within the objectifiable system of expectations that arises for each work in the historical moment of its appearance, from a pre-understanding of the genre, from the form and themes of already familiar works, and from the opposition between poetic and practical language. (p. 22)

The expectations of the reader condition in various ways the meaning he or she is able to derive from the text. The reader associates the text with a certain genre, a certain style, a certain type of language, and as a result projects a certain disposition onto the text.

In the case of history textbooks we may assume that most readers expect an objective presentation of history, an account that represents a truthful summary of past events, a description of the key facts and occurrences, all communicated in an authoritative language. As Wertsch (1998) puts it, textbooks are expected to represent history as “an integrated whole” (pp. 80–81; Paxton, 1999). At the same time, readers may not expect to find in a textbook an account that points to the moral and political weaknesses of their own nation. The text’s horizon of expectations indicates both what is expected to be included in the text and what is expected to be excluded

from it. The genre sets expectations by framing the range of possible meanings readers can derive from the textbook narrative.

Take, for example, the reading of Jacob, the father of Natalie who is a student at the City School. In the interview, Jacob brought up the question of who was the “someone” who opened fire—Jew or Arab? After his daughter declared that she believes that Jews opened fire, Jacob, an attorney by profession, endorsed her view. He explained:

Yes, I agree that “someone opened fire” are code words meaning that Jews opened fire and not necessarily Arabs, because in all these texts if Arabs had opened fire first they would be very happy to immediately write that. And when [the text states that] “someone opened fire,” it makes the whole thing blurry, and when someone reads it with an uncritical eye he can understand that Arabs opened fire.

Jacob builds upon his preliminary conceptions of what textbooks are, to draw a conclusion regarding what truly occurred at Tel Hai. Textbook accounts are patriotic; they disguise the unpleasant history of one’s nation; they expose the unpleasant history of the enemy; the authors of the textbook know the “true” history; they decide whether to expose or conceal it based on nationalist considerations.

As a result of his horizon of expectations, Jacob concludes that the ones who opened fire at Tel Hai must have been Jews. If the ones who opened fire were Arabs, Jacob’s line of argument goes, the textbook authors would be more than happy to point that out. Only when Jews are responsible for the eruption of violence would the authors of the textbook want to blur this fact. Since the text blurs the identity of those responsible for the skirmish, it follows, says Jacob, that the Jews opened fire.

One implication of this emphasis on the reader’s expectations is that the reading and meaning-making process of texts alter with the changing expectations and experience of the readers. As Jauss (1982) states:

A literary work is not an object that stands by itself and that offers the same view to each reader in each period. It is not a monument that monologically reveals its timeless essence. It is much more like an orchestration that strikes ever new resonances among its readers and that frees the text from the material of the words and brings it to a contemporary existence. (p. 21)

Audiences’ horizons of expectations, and the meanings they draw from the text, change with their altering perceptions. Yet outstanding literary works are at times capable of altering the literary horizon of expectations in relation to a certain genre or style (Holub, 1984).

In his reading Jacob fails to notice the new horizon of expectations that the authors of the textbook *The 20th Century* are aiming to form. Due to his own horizon of expectations formed over years of schooling, Jacob is unable to notice that the authors of this specific textbook aim to create an

untraditional narrative, one that in fact shifts the responsibility for the skirmish away from the Arabs and onto an unknown person. He does not notice the authors' attempt to pursue a tangential history of the Israeli–Arab conflict, a history in which the whole event of Tel Hai becomes insignificant and constitutes a misunderstanding that was followed by a century of bloody conflict.

When it comes to textbooks, students as well as teachers have a very rigid horizon of expectations. They see the textbook not as representing history but rather as the embodiment of history itself. In their view, textbooks do not reflect the author's perspective on history but rather they *are* history itself, not a representation of it (Wineburg, 2001). Textbooks, students believe, represent a patriotic viewpoint. Students do not approach a textbook as pure observers; rather, they come armed with a set of expectations formed from their own experience. Long before students even turn the first page of a textbook, the meaning of the textbook account is restricted and limited by their horizon of expectations.

The Gaps in the Text

The meaning of texts, as Wolfgang Iser (1979) points out, is never as straightforward as it may seem. The meaning is located neither in the text nor in the reader. Rather, we should search for the meaning in the reader's realization of the text:

The work is more than the text, for the text only takes on life when it is realized, and furthermore the realization is by no means independent of the individual disposition of the reader—though this in turn is acted upon by the different patterns of the text. The convergence of text and reader brings the literary work into existence, and this convergence can never be precisely pinpointed, but must always remain virtual, as it is not to be identified either with the reality of the text or with the individual disposition of the reader. (pp. 274–275)

In Iser's thought, one of the ways in which the reader inserts meaning into the text is through textual "gaps." Texts are full of "gaps" or "blanks," and it is up to the reader to fill them in. The absence of clear figures or explicit motivations are just one kind of possible gaps or blanks in the text. The gaps may reside between two unconnected passages of the text or in an ambiguous statement in the text. Inevitably, each and every text will have such gaps or blanks. If the gap is not filled in, no clear plot can be developed. The reader is thus required to bridge the gaps (Iser, 1995, pp. 24–28; Prince, 1980).

The juncture of two or more segments where the gap is formed constitutes, for Iser, a "field of vision for the wandering viewpoint." The construction of a connection between the two segments shapes the meaning of the developing narrative. One passage must gain prominence, while the other

recedes into the background. Also, the filling of a blank requires the reader to insert new information that can assist in closing the breach between the segments, an action that introduces new meanings brought into the text by the reader. By filling in the gaps, readers endow texts with new and unexpected meanings (Iser cited in Holub, 1984, pp. 93–94).

The gaps in the text thus spur the reader into action. It is not simply that the reader passively accepts and internalizes the narrative being read; rather, it is the interaction between text and reader that creates the text's meaning. As Iser (1995) states:

Communication in literature, then, is a process set in motion and regulated, not by a given code, but by a mutually restrictive and magnifying interaction between the explicit and implicit, between revelation and concealment. What is concealed spurs the reader into action, but this action is also controlled by what is revealed; the explicit in turn is transformed when the implicit has been brought to light. Whenever the reader bridges the gaps, communication begins. The gaps function as a kind of pivot on which the whole text-reader relationship revolves. (p. 24)

The filling of gaps is thus crucial to forming the meaning of the text. The gaps both allow for new and unexpected meanings to be inserted into the text, and act to restrict the spectrum of possible meanings. The gap is placed between words or segments of text, giving structure to the text that is being deciphered. Gaps serve as imaginative boundaries for the reader's meaning-making process (Holub, 1984; Todorov, 1980).

Yet, the filling in of a blank may color the narrative with significantly diverse meanings. Take, for example, the case of Michael from Talmud School and Natalie from City School, both Israeli 12th-grade students who had completed the national matriculation exam in history in the 11th grade. Michael and Natalie come from opposite sides of Israeli society: Natalie is secular, while Michael is religious; Natalie identifies with the Israeli left wing, Michael with the right; Natalie advocates dismantling Jewish settlements in the Occupied Territories, while Michael lives in such a settlement.

Both Natalie and Michael read the same textbook excerpt describing the Tel Hai incident. They read that "on the 1st of March 1920 the Arabs besieged Tel Hai, asking to search it for Frenchmen. . . . Due to a misunderstanding between [the Arabs] and Tel Hai's Jewish inhabitants, someone opened fire, and a skirmish ensued that left several people dead." Michael summarizes the excerpt as follows:

Interviewer: Yes. What do you learn from here?

Michael: I learn from here that it was in 1920. . . . Because of a misunderstanding a skirmish ensued when shots began. The Arabs claimed as an excuse that they were shot at, this is not written here [in the textbook] but I think this is what happened, and then they [the Arabs] began to shoot, like I wrote earlier, and to throw hand-grenades.

In his reading Michael encounters a gap in the text, namely the words “someone opened fire.” As I pointed out in my introduction, this formulation of the sentence does not identify the person or the group responsible for the battle of Tel Hai and its resulting bloodshed.

Michael, as a practiced reader, instinctively fills in the gap. He, like many of his interviewed classmates, points his finger at the Arabs as the ones who opened fire. To locate this meaning in the text, Michael uses a unique way of reading. He takes the sentence “someone opened fire” and places it in the mouth of the Arabs. When the Arabs approached the gates of Tel Hai, Michael’s reading goes, they accusingly told the Jews that “someone opened fire at us.” When the settlers opened the gates, he continues, the Arabs carried out their original intention, namely, to storm the settlement and slaughter the Jews.

In the passages that precede and follow the gap in the text, Michael reads the textbook excerpt almost literally. His reading is restricted by the text and only when he reaches the textual gap does he insert additional information, pointing at the Arabs as those who opened fire. While the textbook account restricts his narrative framework, his resolution of the gaps colors the whole meaning of the historical narrative with a new and unexpected meaning.

Michael is well aware that he is adding information beyond the text. He says, “This is not written here,” but he still thinks, “This is what happened.” Although he does not say so, he may truly believe that his understanding does not alter the authors’ intention in any meaningful way, but rather just serves to explain it. He does not see a contradiction between his account and that of the authors, but rather attempts to reconcile his cultural knowledge with the textbook narrative.

In the following lines of the interview, Michael repeats this reading when he says:

The Bedouins and the Arabs in the area, wanted to search for a group of French in the area they claimed were hiding in Tel Hai, yes? And when they came there [to Tel Hai] they [the Arabs] claimed that they were shot at, presumably, there was a misunderstanding in the shot, they [the Arabs] were shot at this is what they [the Arabs] claimed, and then they [the Arabs] began to shoot.

In fact, one year later, in his post-narrative, Michael repeats this viewpoint. He writes, “The Arabs approached the settlement [of Tel Hai] and not with good intentions and they besieged the Jews and the Arabs stood outside and accused them of something. Joseph Trumpeldor . . . allowed 20 Arabs to enter and conduct a search . . . and they entered and began to slaughter and kill and they claimed the Jews opened fire first.”

How did Michael come to read the text in a way that lays responsibility squarely on the shoulders of the Arabs? Michael’s case demonstrates a situation in which the reader adjusts the textual gap to his or her own

cultural milieu, and in so doing frames the text's meaning (Chartier, 1997). For Michael, coming from a specific cultural setting of the settlers' movement in Israel, it is clear who are the aggressors and who the victims in the Israeli–Arab conflict. In his mind, the aggressors are the Arabs and the victims are the Jewish settlers.

In the terms of Michel De Certeau, Michael is “poaching” the text. Reading, argues De Certeau, is an act of secretive reinvention and resistance. In reading the text, readers appropriate it and frame it so it corresponds to their conceptions. The reader of the text is far from passive. On the contrary, as in Michael's case, the reader invents a meaning different from the authors' intended meaning. In this case Michael “poached” the coincidental meaning intended by the authors of the text and replaced it with an intentional combative meaning. This meaning is fiercer than that of the original myth: not only did the Arabs slaughter the Jews, they used trickery to achieve their goal (De Certeau, 1995).

City School student Natalie, who read the same textbook as Michael, also noticed the gap in the text. She, however, came to a very different conclusion. Natalie sees an analogy between the context of settling Tel Hai in 1920 and the settlements of post-1967 Occupied Territories. Responding to a question in the textbook if one should educate students on the statement attributed to Trumpeldor, “It is good to die for one's country,” she explains that the answer depends on the context. It is important to defend the state of Israel, to defend places in which many Jews live, but “to control lands that are not settled by Jews at all because they are part of the [greater] Land of Israel . . . this just causes continuous wars in our country . . . and it is not good to die for our land and not with such pride.” For Natalie, who explicitly opposes Israel's occupation of the Territories, the case of Tel Hai (which is not in the Occupied Territories) is another case in which it is not worth dying to fulfill the dreams of a Greater Israel. In fact, she says, the whole incident of Tel Hai was of unnecessary deaths that resulted from “a stupid misunderstanding.”

While Natalie's reading of the sentence of “someone opened fire” was unmatched in her conclusions by any other student (and in fact she herself later changed her mind regarding it), it highlights the range of possible interpretations open to readers. After reading the text, she turns to her father and asks:

Natalie: Was this an area [populated] by Bedouins and Arabs? Dad?

Father: Now . . . it is unclear . . . from the text . . . it says: “someone opened fire,” who is this “someone”? Did Jews open fire or did Arabs open fire?

Natalie: But that does not answer me.

Father: What?

Natalie: The ones who were at Tel Hai, who settled Tel Hai, who were they?

Father: They were Jews. It was Trumpeldor and I think eight members of the Shomer [an organization of Jewish guards]. They lived in a place close to Kfar Giladi and they guarded the area, the Jewish settlements in the area.

Natalie: OK.

Father: Now . . . it is unclear . . . from the text . . . it is written here: "someone opened fire," who is this "someone"? Did Jews open fire or did Arabs open fire?

Natalie (interrupts): It makes more sense that it was Jews.

Interviewer: Why does it make sense that Jews [opened fire]?

Natalie: Because it sounds to me like a misunderstanding, that Arabs came to check if French [were hiding] there and someone did not understand . . . why a group of Arabs is entering the settlement. According to the order of writing, "they besieged Tel Hai, asking to search it for Frenchmen," etc., and then "Due to a misunderstanding between them and Tel Hai's Jewish inhabitants, someone opened fire." They entered [the settlement] and there was a misunderstanding and someone opened fire, so it makes more sense that it was a Jew.

When Jacob, Natalie's father, explains in the opening of the excerpt that only Trumpeldor and eight Jews defended Tel Hai and the Jewish "settlements" in the area in the face of the Bedouins and Arabs who lived in the area, this answer evoked in Natalie's mind the context of Jewish settlements of post-1967 territories populated by a few Jews and surrounded by many Arabs. Today, in these settlements, Jews are the ones who carry weapons; Arabs entering the settlements, especially if they carry weapons, are viewed as potential threats. When Jews at Tel Hai saw Arabs entering the settlement, like in contemporary settlement, Natalie seems to think, they suspected their intentions and opened fire. Evoking experience of her contemporary world, Natalie fills in the gap, so the Jews at Tel Hai appear as the aggressors, thus transforming the text's ambiguity into a distinct meaning. Also, according to Natalie's logic the order of actions demands that the Jews opened fire. The Arabs take first action in this battle when they come and besiege Tel Hai. In a war the other side responds and therefore the "someone" who opened fire must have been Jewish, Natalie claims.

Tzvetan Todorov (1980) points out that texts evoke in readers imaginary and experienced worlds, worlds that help them construct the meaning of the text. In the process of reading, the reader continuously searches for causes of events, and he or she finds them in their imaginary or experienced life.

These evoked worlds also may have shaped Natalie's reading of the text. Just like Michael, Natalie notices the gap in the text. However, in sharp contrast to Michael, Natalie points her finger at the Jews as the ones who opened fire. The Arabs came into the settlement intending simply to search for French soldiers, their true enemies at the time. Some Jews, who were unaware of this search, saw a group of Arabs and their suspicion was aroused. They instinctively began shooting.

Michael and Natalie come from opposing sectors of Israeli society and they gave the textbook narrative opposing historical interpretations, yet they both formed the text's meaning by filling in the textual gap left by the authors. Both did so in ways that matched their imaginary and experienced

worlds. Furthermore, both interpretations contrast with the authors' goals of minimizing the intentional violence in the portrayed encounter between Jews and Arabs at Tel Hai.

As Iser (1979) asserts,

The fact that completely different readers can be differently affected by the "reality" of a particular text is ample evidence of the degree to which literary texts transform reading into a creative process that is far above mere perception of what is written. The literary text activates our own faculties, enabling us to recreate the world it presents. The product of this creative activity is what we might call the virtual dimension of the text, which endows it with its reality. This virtual dimension is not the text itself, nor is it the imagination of the reader: it is the coming together of text and imagination. (p. 279)

Narrative Integration

The skeleton account of Tel Hai presented in the textbook gives only the technical details of the event, the basic facts, dates, figures, and occurrences. The historical figures and events have no passion, no personality, no love or hate. The text does not reveal the nature of the misunderstanding that caused "someone" to open fire.

Such a skeleton narrative frequently activates readers' imaginations, causing them to attempt to add flesh to the story and bring it to life. Take, for example, Nathan, a student at the City School who lives in an upper-class neighborhood in Jerusalem. Nathan, who says he almost never went to history class and instead watched historical movies, integrates the textbook narrative with the narrative of a film he saw a year earlier, *The Battle of Tel Hai* (Sabag & Raskin, 2000). In his "narrative integration," Nathan takes the motionless skeleton narrative presented in the textbook and fleshes it out, lending the participants faces, passions, incentives, and actions that he saw in the film.

In the following excerpt from Nathan's account, I have highlighted in upper case the details Nathan took from the textbook (that possibly also appear in the film narrative), and in italics those that appear *only* in the film narrative.

Nathan: I don't know, actually here [in the textbook account] we did not receive so much information, except for **IT BEING IN THE FRENCH MANDATE, AND A LITTLE BIT OF WHERE IT WAS ON THE MAP . . . AND THE YEARS.**

Mother: But the part about a misunderstanding [in the textbook] is really interesting. . . . [The battle] was pointless.

Nathan: In the movie [I saw], *one woman whose husband died in the war and many [men] courted her, lost her sanity.* **NOW, WHEN THE BEDOUINS CAME Joseph Trumpeldor LET THEM IN and everyone was tense . . . and they put the crazy woman upstairs so she wouldn't shoot the Arabs. And upstairs some [Jews] guarded her, but suddenly she grabbed a pistol and began shooting. Now the narrator of the story [in the movie] is the one who guarded her, and then [downstairs] EVERYONE BEGAN TO SHOOT AND TRUMPELDOR WAS SHOT. So the first shot was not associated with what was going on downstairs, but**

when [the Jews and Arabs] downstairs heard that first shot—because this woman went berserk and tried to grab a pistol, AND MISTAKENLY A SHOT WAS FIRED—so the Jews and Arabs [downstairs] got nervous and took their pistols and began shooting [each other] AND THE BATTLE BEGAN.

Interviewer: And downstairs what happened?

Nathan: *Until then they talked, [asking] ARE THE FRENCH IN [THE COMPOUND] OR NOT.*

When the Arabs arrived at Tel Hai, says Nathan, Trumpeldor granted them permission to enter the compound and search for Frenchmen. In the compound the Jews were guarding an insane woman, who lost her sanity after her heart was broken over a love affair. At one point this woman grabbed a gun and fired. The Jews and the Arabs assembled downstairs to talk about the French soldiers, and when both sides heard the shot they each suspected that the opponents' side opened fire and began shooting each other. As a result of this shot, which was *not* associated with the Arabs' visit, the battle ensued.

Nathan takes the textbook's skeleton narrative and integrates it with the film narrative. Whereas the textbook does not reveal the identity of that "someone" who opened fire, Nathan asserts this someone was a crazy woman. He unveils not only the identity of that "someone" who opened fire, but also the reason that caused her to fire, namely, her broken heart. In integrating the narratives, Nathan infuses the historical account and protagonists within it, with personality and passion.

In fact, what Nathan has done here is what I call "narrative integration." Nathan has taken what may seem at first sight to be two distinct and competing narratives, one historical and the other fictional, one of geopolitical dimensions and the other of a broken heart, and integrated them into one validated historical narrative. In this integration of narratives he has clearly buttressed the textbook account and enlivened it.

The narrative integration, however, not only fortifies and fleshes out the textbook account; it also shapes the memory of the film narrative. Note that most of the basic elements of the story's details match those given in the textbook: the Jews, the Arabs, the visit of the Arabs to Tel Hai, their search for French soldiers, the misunderstanding between Jews and Arabs, and the view that "someone" opened fire. This corroboration between the textbook account and the film account allows the textbook with its perceived authority to validate the cinematic account. The film, which may be suspected of fictionalizing history, gains support for its account from the history textbook which is perceived as an indicator of the historical truth. The fact that the textbook corroborates only some basic facts that appear in the film makes no difference. Nathan uses it as a historical validation of the entire account presented in the film.

This integration of narratives demonstrated by Nathan is an example of what Wertsch describes as "distributed memory." Contrary to the perspectives contending that historical memory is embodied either in individual

memory or in the text, Wertsch points out that historical memory is distributed between agents and texts. He notes that “the task becomes one of listening for the texts and the voices of the particular individuals using these texts in particular settings” (2002, p. 6). Historical memory is located in the realization of the textbook narrative by the student in a certain context.

The individual, however, is not limited to one text or one narrative. Rather, he or she utilizes a variety of texts. “Textual resources used in collective memory usually do not take the form of isolated, hermetically sealed units that are either used in unmodified form and in their entirety or not used at all. Instead they constitute a much more flexible kind of instrument that can be harnessed in combination with others in novel ways” (Wertsch, 2002, p. 7).

Thus, when the individual agent forms his or her narrative of a historical event, it is not only based on the text that the student just read, but rather “memory is more a matter of reorganizing, reconstructing, bits of information into a general scheme than it is a matter of accurate recall of the isolated bits themselves” (Wertsch, 2002, p. 7). The construction of meaning is a dynamic process that negotiates between different accounts within each and every individual in his or her society to formulate historical memory.

CONCLUSION

In this study, students who read the textbook excerpts arrived at a meaning that was clearly distinguished from that which the author intended. Whereas the author attempted to present the event of Tel Hai as a minor skirmish in which “someone” opened fire, most students drew from the text a malevolent understanding in which either Jews or Arabs shot first (save the case of the heart-broken women). This gap between intended and realized meaning is well explored in the literature, as pointed out in the introduction to this article.

The process by which readers arrive at their individual meanings, the way in which they decipher the text to form a meaning from it, has however, been much less widely explored. In this article, I identify three reading processes: horizons of expectations, gaps in the text, and narrative integration, processes which by no means cover the entire range of possible ways in which readers construct meaning. While the three processes used by readers differ from one another—as I will discuss below—they also have at least one important commonality. In all three processes readers’ prior information—real or imaginary, experienced or learned—affects the meaning they draw from the text. Readers’ prior information about the nature of genre (i.e., the textbook genre), about the specific events (i.e., the Tel Hai event), or the event’s context (i.e., Jews and Arabs relations) has an important role in formation of the meaning they end up drawing from the text. We all come to the reading process with our own bank of

experiences, knowledge, and conceptions and consciously or subconsciously utilize this prior knowledge in our reading process, thus shaping the meaning we make from a text.

The nature of this prior information and manner in which readers use it in deciphering the account, however, is different in each of the three reading processes examined in this article. In the case of horizons of expectations, readers' prior information is not specifically related to the topic discussed in the text. Rather, it relates to general information about the nature of the genre. Even before the readers decipher the first word in a text, his or her initial knowledge of the genre channels the treatment of that text. In contrast, in the remaining two processes, the readers' prior information comes to play while they read the text. Contrary to horizon of expectation, the prior information in the other two reading processes relates not to the type of the text but to its content.

The way in which readers use this prior information about the event in the two remaining reading processes also differs. In the case of gaps in the text, the reader integrates specific bits of information into the existing narrative. The reader accepts the given narrative as the basis for the account and inserts and interprets the texts in ways that shape and alter the meaning of the entire narrative. Only one bit of information changes the meaning while the remaining textual framework remains largely intact. When a reader integrates narratives, however, the narrative presented in the text and the reader's prior narrative are taken as almost equal in significance (this may also apply in the case of a competing narrative, although this case would have to be examined). The reader brings the two together to formulate a combined narrative, which is new and different from the original one. In the case of narrative integration, the reader's actions cause the original texts framework to lose in many cases its standing as the reader formulates a new framework. Unlike the gaps in the text in which the readers accept the text's basic framework, in the case of narrative integration the reader abandons the original framework of the text.

Yet it must be emphasized that it is not the use of a specific reading process that results in a specific kind of meaning. As demonstrated in this article, two readers may use the same reading process and arrive at differing meanings, while two readers may use different reading processes and arrive at the same meaning. Clearly, focus on the gap between intended and realized meaning alone is insufficient to determine the way in which this gap is formed by individuals. Our focus should not remain on the final meaning that readers derive from the text but rather on the unique reading processes which readers use, the process by which they construct meaning while reading.

NOTES

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1. As stated above, this article is based on a larger study. For the details of that study and its methodological structure see Porat (2004).
2. This section of the paper was read by the textbook's author, Eyal Naveh, who confirmed my analysis and interpretation as matching his views and intentions.

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